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OUR DEFENCELESS COASTS.

BY REPRESENTATIVE GEORGE N. SOUTHWICK, OF NEW YORK.

AMONG the statesmanlike utterances of Samuel J. Tilden, for which his name should be honored and cherished, the most notable was his appeal for a proper defence of the coasts of the United States. With Mr. Tilden the idea of the urgent necessity for coast defences assumed the proportions of a hobby. But his words fell upon deaf ears and he was gathered to his fathers without having witnessed the realization of his day-dream. Indeed, while in the flesh, he was roundly abused for proposing what was termed an endless expenditure of money. I recall from the literature of the times a cartoon in which the venerable Tilden was represented as standing with trembling limbs on the roof of Graystone and gazing anxiously through his telescope, seaward, as if he discerned, hard down on the horizon, black smoke pouring from the funnels of a British man of war.

Truly it was a perverse generation with which Mr. Tilden and other far-sighted men were compelled to deal, in urging the defence of the country's coasts. Let me suggest sample arguments of the times, which satisfied the average American that peculiar conditions and circumstances entered in to relieve the United States from the application of the ancient adage that peace was the proper time in which to prepare for war.

"Surely, do not 3,000 miles of ocean intervene between this country and Europe, isolating us from the only source whence a hostile attack could come ?

"And, moreover, did not the great and good Father of his Country caution us against foreign alliances and entanglements, and have we not heeded his warning religiously ?

"Then, where is the danger and why sink millions of the people's money in the defence of our coasts ?"

Such were some of the popular queries of familiar ring ; and the Tilden argument went by the board.

The truth of the matter was that the American people had been surfeited with war and were suffering from a reaction against it and everything pertaining to it. Furthermore, the experiences of the civil conflict had inspired in them a blind confidence in their inventive genius and ability to meet any crisis which might arise.

Whatever the influence at work, the results are known of all men :—coast defences almost entirely lacking ; merely the nucleus of a navy ; an army insignificant in numbers and organized on a basis which has been discarded by every other civilized nation.

The document which President Cleveland sent to Congress, on the afternoon of December 17, 1895, changed the entire aspect of affairs and brought about a new order of public sentiment on the question of national defence. That Venezuelan message has been well likened to a flash of lightning out of a clear sky at mid-day ; and the thunder which followed startled the American people as had nothing else since Beauregard's opening gun in Charleston harbor, in 1861, proclaimed the war between the sections. The President's declaration was one of defiance—possibly of war—against the most powerful and resourceful nation of Europe. It startled, especially because the practical judgment of Americans told them that they were totally, negligently, and almost criminally, unprepared for war ; unprepared even for defence on land, much less aggression on the ocean.

Britannia ruled the waves as in the days of Drake and Nelson, while her military outposts extended along our northern border ; and hostilities meant the immediate advent of flying squadrons off the harbors of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, New Orleans, and San Francisco, if not the presence, *via* the Welland canal, of vessels of war before Chicago, Milwaukee, Duluth, Cleveland, and Buffalo.

The situation was humiliating, as well as startling. And what a commentary it was on the prudence and foresight of the wealthiest people on the globe that we were compelled to rely for protection not on formidable earthworks and rifled guns of steel, but rather on the justice of the President's proposition for international arbitration, and the known conservatism of Great Britain in dealing with nations of the first class, growing out of repug-

nance to any conflict which ultimately would involve the loss of commerce and markets, if not of territory and prestige. Then it was poor consolation to Americans to recall that a policy of inaction regarding coast defence had saved to the people a few millions of dollars. And I doubt whether there is under the stars-and-stripes to-day a single intelligent and patriotic citizen who doubts the wisdom, if we shall be so fortunate as to escape from our present dilemma, of putting the coasts of the nation into a proper condition of defence.

Instinctively the public thought, at the first alarm over the Venezuelan question, was directed toward the city and harbor of New York. If our coasts were unprotected, certainly the greatest prize which a foreign foe could hope to secure, and to the possession of which his energies would be directed instantly, was the commercial, industrial, and financial metropolis of the Western hemisphere.

And what a pitiable spectacle was presented! Throughout the length and breadth of the grand harbor and along the magnificent approach from the ocean the vast population and wealth of the city enjoyed the protection of only two great guns of modern make, which might hurl destruction at the invader. As in mockery, antiquated smooth bores alone frowned through the portholes and from the parapets of Forts Wadsworth and Hamilton. Fort Lafayette was a picturesque ruin. A beggarly array of mortars at Sandy Hook did evidence patriotic preparation in the art of national self-defence. True it is that Fort Hancock at the Hook had also been equipped with two twelve-inch guns of modern make—the most formidable type of gun yet manufactured in this country for coast defence. The rest of the armament at the Hook consisted of three dynamite guns—two of fifteen-inch and one of eight-inch calibre. Fort Hamilton, it was boasted, possessed a ten-inch monster of nickel steel, but the gun, it was discovered, lay skidded up on the concrete of the emplacement which had been prepared for it, awaiting a carriage. Fort Wadsworth had been favored with an eight-inch gun, but that also was not in position.

Therein was embraced the entire complement of defences for New York harbor.

At the entrance from Long Island Sound, Fort Schuyler and Willet's Point were armed with what would have been formidable

monsters of iron, if modern naval operations were conducted from behind "wooden walls."

Yet the harbor of New York is in a more advanced stage of defence than any other on two oceans and the Gulf of Mexico. Indeed, there are only two other harbors where the slightest beginning has been made. Boston and San Francisco each have sixteen twelve-inch mortars in position, while a fifteen-inch dynamite gun battery for San Francisco has recently been completed.

All other harbors are absolutely defenceless.

Philadelphia is as helpless against the passage of British war vessels up Delaware Bay as more than a century ago, when Lord Howe was in possession of the Quaker city. No biting shots from shore batteries would delay a Cockburn gayly sailing into Chesapeake Bay. Baltimore might be reduced to ashes, but Fort McHenry would be wrapped in silence rather than the smoke of battle; and a captive Key would peer in vain, amid the glare of rockets and the bursting of bombs, for a sight of the waving stars-and-stripes. The Potomac would be accessible despite Fort Washington; and at Washington no resistance could be made to the second application of fire to the national capital and the destruction of other public buildings containing the invaluable records of the government. Historic Charleston harbor, where the grim Moultrie gallantly planted his colors and replied to British broadsides with even deadlier cannonade, in Revolutionary days, and where Confederate batteries reduced Sumter to submission and baffled every effort of a fleet of Union iron-clads to reduce them, in the sixties, would fall a prey to a *Blake* or *Benbow* without the firing of a shot. No British Farragut would need lash himself in the rigging and risk his life in capturing the port of Mobile; for, on steaming up to the wharves, he would be presented, peacefully, with the keys and freedom of the city. Nor would the advance upon New Orleans from the Gulf be obstructed by the batteries of Forts Jackson and St. Philip, as was the case thirty-four years ago.

The coast defences of 1775-'81, 1812-'15, and 1861-'65 were elaborate, when contemporaneous conditions and the stage of development in ordnance and fortifications are considered, compared with the condition of things which obtains to-day. Preceding generations, at least, protected the nation from attack to the extent which their skill and resources permitted.

Gen. Nelson A. Miles, of the United States Army, may be regarded as a competent witness regarding the defenceless condition of our coasts. After returning from a recent tour of inspection through Southern seaport cities, the General said: "As to defences, Savannah has none. The old fortifications have gone to ruin, and what there is left is of no value as a means of defence. Charleston is also without protection, and so is Mobile, New Orleans, and Galveston. . . . From Portland to Galveston there has been little or nothing accomplished toward the defences of the important cities." Then the General proceeded to disillusionize those who fondly imagine that torpedoes and mines can be hastily improvised as a means of defence for our ports. "Torpedoes are all very well," he said, "when they work, but no country can place absolute reliance in one type of destructive instruments. There must always be a combination of heavy guns, mortars, mines, and torpedoes, working together to make great commercial cities on the sea absolutely safe from an enemy's fleet. Submarine mines can be located quickly, and are unquestionably valuable adjuncts to forts and mortars, but there are difficulties in the way of placing them frequently. It would not be impossible for a fleet knowing the location of these mines to approach within a reasonably safe distance and destroy them with its own guns; nor, with light-draught vessels, would it be impracticable to steam over them."

United States Senator John L. Wilson, of Washington, has drawn a graphic picture describing our helplessness on the Pacific Coast. "So far as the northwestern coast is concerned," he says, "we have absolutely no fortifications whatever. The English have a great naval station at Esquimaux, upon the Straits of Fuca, and our shores are within the sound of the morning and evening gun of Great Britain. They have their gunboats, torpedoes and a first-class armament in every particular. They could lay tribute in twelve hours upon all the cities of Puget Sound, and take possession and control the coal supply of the Pacific Coast, and we are absolutely defenceless. . . . Not only is the commerce of Puget Sound of great importance, but, as I have above stated, the coal supply of the Sound would be exceedingly valuable in case of war. The growing importance of Alaska and the boundary dispute there give additional strategic importance to that section of the country."

Despite the backwardness of actual preparations, a broad and comprehensive plan for coast defences was laid out more than nine years ago. In December, 1886, President Cleveland, in his annual message to Congress, voiced the Tilden idea, when he declared: "The defenceless condition of our seacoast and lake frontier is perfectly palpable; the examinations made must convince us all that certain of our cities should be fortified and that work on the most important of these fortifications should be commenced at once. The absolute necessity, judged by all standards of prudence and foresight, of our preparation for an effectual resistance against the armored ships and steel guns and mortars of modern construction, which may threaten the cities on our coasts, is so apparent that I hope effective steps will be taken in that direction immediately."

It was from President Cleveland's first Secretary of War, William C. Endicott, that the plan of coast defence took its name. The Endicott plan contemplated the thorough fortification of twenty-seven ports, to which the Puget Sound ports were afterwards added. It involved the construction of 677 guns and 824 mortars, at a cost of over \$97,000,000, and floating batteries, also, at a cost of over \$28,000,000. The recommendations of the Fortifications Board, in which the plan was devised, called for an immediate appropriation of \$21,500,000 and \$9,000,000 annually thereafter.

Had the four Congresses since 1886 shown the same zeal and liberality for coast defences as has been manifested in appropriations for pensions, rivers and harbors and public buildings, the year 1895 would have witnessed the complete performance of the great work contemplated under the Endicott plan, provided the Fortification Board judged the proportions of the undertaking and the time required, correctly. But the "watchdogs of the Treasury" and the necessities of "political economy" reduced the official estimates for coast defences, embraced under the head of Fortifications, as for no other branch of national expenditure.

The discriminating policy pursued by Congress may be detected at a glance, when the estimates and appropriations of the last Congress, for the year ending with June 30, 1896, are considered. For Agriculture, Army, Diplomatic and Consular, District of Columbia, Indian, Legislative, Military Academy, Navy, Pension, Post Office, River and Harbor and Sundry Civil appro-

priations, the estimates of the various departments were \$376,-910,826.68; the actual appropriations, \$371,906,964.65—or 98.7 per cent. of the estimates. In the case of Fortifications, however, the estimate of \$7,357,703.50 was cut down to an appropriation of \$1,904,557.50—or 25.9 per cent. of the estimate. And the present year, comparatively speaking, has been one of Congressional liberality so far as fortification appropriations are concerned.

Where, since 1886, the original Endicott plan called for an expenditure of over \$97,000,000, actual appropriations have aggregated only \$10,631,000.

The first appropriation for guns was made seven years ago and for emplacements five years ago. For both guns and emplacements the annual appropriations have averaged only \$1,500,000, although seven times as large an expenditure was projected.

Secretary of War Lamont has notified the President that if future appropriations for the manufacture of guns, mortars, and carriages be no larger than the average authorized for the purpose since 1888, it will require twenty-two years more to supply the armament of the eighteen important ports for which complete projects are approved, and if the appropriations for the engineer work are to continue at the rate of the annual appropriations since 1890, the Secretary further declares, it will require seventy years to complete the emplacements and platforms for the armament of these ports.

While Congressional parsimony in the matter of coast defence has sadly embarrassed the project, nevertheless real progress has been made, which will henceforth be increasingly apparent. The establishment and preparation of the nation's great gun factory at the Watervliet Arsenal, West Troy, absorbed a large portion of the meagre appropriations for several years. Now the plant is practically completed, and the nation has a complete gun factory, which will compare favorably with the celebrated works of the Krupps at Essen or any other famous gun factory of Europe. Work on the actual construction of guns at the Watervliet factory has now been in progress for seven years. That operations have not been conducted on a scale at all commensurate with the capacity of the works goes without saying, in view of the small appropriations.

The Chief of Ordnance of the War Department, General D.

W. Flagler, before the Senate Committee on Coast Defences, in January, submitted his estimate of what was required to provide the raw materials and other supplies, and operate the Watervliet works at its full capacity of sixteen hours a day, during the next fiscal year beginning with July 1st. His figures were \$15,589,877, including \$3,198,000 for the expense of operating the gun-factory. They indicate the enormous capacity of the Watervliet works for turning out the instruments of coast defence in the form of guns and mortars. In view of the statement of Secretary Lamont that appropriations not only for guns but also for emplacements have averaged but \$1,500,000 annually, since their construction was begun in 1888 and 1890, General Flagler's figures for the coming fiscal year at Watervliet likewise indicate the indifferent manner in which operations at the nation's gun factory have been conducted hitherto, by reason of insufficient appropriations. And as the operation of any great manufacturing establishment at a small percentage of its capacity means expensive operation, it is clearly seen that Congressional parsimony has increased the price of every gun turned out at the Watervliet factory beyond what would have been the case if the factory had been operated at anything like its full capacity. Evidently Congressional "watch-dogs" and "economists" of the Holman variety have overlooked that industrial consideration in annually cutting down appropriations for coast defences. At its full daily capacity, on a sixteen-hour basis, the Watervliet factory can turn out fully 100 guns of eight, ten and twelve-inch calibre in a year. Even with an eight-hour day fifty big guns can be completed annually.

The only evidence of expedition in the matter of coast defence was in the action of Congress, when the long delay in the establishment of the Watervliet factory and in the beginning of gun-making operations, tempted it to enter into a contract with the Bethlehem Iron Works, of Bethlehem, Pa., for the construction of a hundred heavy guns during a series of years. No further contract with any private concern is likely, inasmuch as Secretary Lamont states that the Watervliet gun factory "is capable of producing in ten years the armament required by the present projects." The Secretary might have substituted "five" for "ten," on General Flagler's basis of a sixteen-hour day at Watervliet.

The factory for gun-carriages at the Watertown, N. Y., ar-

senal is about completed and will have a capacity of thirty carriages annually. Twenty were turned out during the past year.

In regard to the employment of mortars, which form the bulk of the existing defences of New York, Boston, and San Francisco, it is well to bear the views of General Miles in mind. Although mortars may be powerful and accurate in their way, they do not dispense with the necessity for eight, ten and twelve-inch guns for long nor short range. A war vessel's hull, down on the horizon, is a small target. A city affords a large target for the vessel's gunners. Army officers declare that British war vessels, with nine-and-two-tenths-inch guns, possessing a range of eleven miles and elevated at an angle of thirty degrees, could quickly reduce Boston to submission with the city's sixteen mortars vainly endeavoring to reach the enemy.

A new feature of the Watervliet factory is a plant for manufacturing sixteen-inch guns, which is being established and is now almost completed. These most formidable monsters have been a subject of scientific controversy as to their efficiency and desirability. But the belief is obtaining wide acceptance among experts on ordnance that they are bound to be a success. General Flagler has strenuously urged provision for their manufacture before the Senate Committee on Coast Defences. The ordnance experts pretty generally agree that the sixteen-inch gun is not intended for long-range fighting. Its operation would be too expensive for that purpose. The shell carried by it weighs 2,370 pounds. But at close range, when the shell could hardly go wide of the mark, the destructive capacity of the sixteen-inch gun is tremendous. Guns of the eight-inch variety are considered a formidable type for long-range work. An officer in the Corps of Engineers of the Government made for me this comprehensive summary regarding sixteen-inch guns: "They are intended to supplement other instruments of defence and provide absolute security for our ports. No armor yet placed upon a vessel of war can withstand a shell from one of these guns. Armor invulnerable to an eight-inch gun is vulnerable to them. They are a last resort, in case the smaller guns, the mortars and the torpedoes and mines fail to restrain the enemy." In that view of the sixteen-inch gun, the officer agrees with the official head of the Ordnance Department.

In his testimony before the Senate Committee on Coast De-

fences, in January, General Miles made an exceedingly effective argument in favor of coast defences when he estimated that the cost of land defences would be much less relatively, than the cost of the navy for the defence of seacoast ports. Although he advocated the maintenance of the navy, he believed that land defences were necessary for the support of the navy, and that one gun on land was worth five guns on a vessel for coast defences, and would cost only one-fifth as much to maintain.

Before the same committee, in February, Admiral John G. Walker made a similar appeal when he presented arguments in favor of the immediate carrying out of plans for efficient coast defences. He urged that the work of building up an invincible navy should go hand in hand with the construction of great defences on land, for only by such a combination could this country, with its enormous coast line, successfully withstand attack by any great maritime power.

Since the first of the year, petitions have been pouring into both branches of Congress, calling for coast defence appropriations. Chambers of commerce, boards of trade and cotton exchanges seem to be awaking to the defenceless condition of our ports; and the essence of their "whereases" is fairly embodied in this excerpt from the memorial of the Manufacturers' Club of Philadelphia:

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia, like other seaboard cities of the United States, has no adequate protection from a foreign enemy in the event of war, and

WHEREAS, In the opinion of one of the most eminent military authorities in the United States, "there certainly should be a liberal appropriation each year until the lives of ten million people living near deep water, and their six billions of property, are placed beyond the possibility of being destroyed or plundered, in any controversy between ourselves and a foreign power," etc.

But petitions, however widely circulated and numerouslv signed, will not necessarily accomplish the desired purpose. The history of the Endicott plan since its inception in 1886, reveals clearly the inherent weakness of the cause of coast defence in Congress. Twenty-one of the forty-five states border on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the Gulf of Mexico, and embrace forty-two, or nearly one-half, of the ninety Senators. But, in the House, the number of sea and gulf districts, within which coast defence operations are contemplated, is comparatively insignificant; and the active, personal interest manifested in coast de-

fence appropriations is correspondingly small. Important as guns and fortifications are at the present juncture, when viewed in a national aspect, they do not appeal to half the Senate and to scarcely as many Representatives as Senators. Compared with the improvement of rivers and harbors, which abound in every Senate state and House district, or with public buildings, the demand for which among Congressmen is universal and unlimited, they are altogether a subordinate matter. Only a patriotic impulse stirred by contemporaneous events or a party policy enforced by the leading spirits in both branches of Congress can carry through a liberal appropriation for guns and fortifications and subordinate internal improvements to external defence. That the Venezuelan war scare has impressed the Congressional leaders that it is "good politics" just now to vote money for patriotic purposes, even if rivers, harbors and public buildings are stinted during the coming year, is sincerely to be hoped. An aroused public sentiment in favor of coast defence manifested in state, county and municipal bodies of a legislative character, in the columns of the press and in political, social and scientific organizations, would assist in influencing Congress. It will be considered "good politics" to favor coast defence, in Congress, when it shall be deemed "bad politics" to trifle with an aroused patriotic sentiment which insists on relief from danger at this crisis and other crises liable to arise in the near future.

That there is a crisis on and that the reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine in the Venezuelan difficulty is a serious departure on the part of the United States is not to be doubted. It logically means foreign entanglements and alliances and, if not accompanied by active preparations to put the nation in a position to treat with its inferiors, at least on the common ground of equality, might better not have been entered upon. An aggressive diplomatic policy, without the accompaniment of effective means of coast defence, if not of aggression on the ocean, would be more than a mistake; it would be a calamity; it would be little less than treason on the part of the American people's sworn defenders at Washington.

GEORGE N. SOUTHWICK.